HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYERS

Skills *by* Design

Strategies for employee development

Alberta
HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT
the people & workplace department

This book is for employers and managers who are interested in employee development programs. It outlines the benefits for establishing development and training programs and offers practical suggestions on how to create and run them.

It will help you by:

- providing the business case for investing time and money in employee development
- presenting you with realistic choices for creating a more skilled and productive workforce
- giving you specific suggestions on how analyse your employees' needs, presenting you with options on how to meet their development and training needs and how to do an evaluation of the program's success
- listing resources available to learn more about employee development and where you can go for further help.

This publication is available on-line through the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website—Alberta's leading on-line source for career, learning and employment information. To access this and additional publications, visit **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop**

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Introduction

Skills by Design: Strategies for employee development is a toolbox for employers looking to sharpen the skills of their workforce. **It's about employee development, or the planned activities to develop the skills and knowledge of workers.**

This book builds the case that any business in Alberta, no matter how small, should have the tools and know-how to do some regular inspection and maintenance of employee skills. Training (on the job, in the classroom) is certainly a part of the package, but it isn't the only method to learn skills or increase knowledge. Employee development can and probably should take many forms: coaching and mentoring, job enrichment, and even job aids such as a pocket-sized card with reminder notes can all be tools you use to tune up skills.

Skills by Design features the why to, how to and practical what-to-do of employee skills development, with success stories from around the province and readily available resources to get you started.

> *We realized about a year ago that we have to make employee development a priority here. We started making a conscious effort to make people aware of skills and the importance of employee development. We are seeing measurable benefits as a result.*
>
> *—Hotel general manager, Banff*

> *The industry is starting to see that the successful organizations are the ones involved in training.*
>
> *—CEO, employer association, construction industry, Edmonton*

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The Business Case for Building Skills

The story on skill shortages

A 2002 study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that up to 265,000 jobs remained unfilled due to a lack of skilled workers[1]. The Conference Board of Canada predicts a shortfall of nearly one million workers within 20 years.[2] In Alberta, close to 60 per cent of small- and medium-sized businesses report problems with a shortage of labour[3] and predict that this trend will continue.

In addition to the benefits of operating a business in Alberta, now and in the foreseeable future, companies must adapt to a variety of specific factors that are behind these human resource issues.

- **Strong economy** – Alberta continues to grow and diversify, with many industries experiencing job growth and labour shortages.
- **Aging labour force** – baby boomers, who make up the largest segment of our workforce, are nearing retirement.
- **Earlier retirements** – more people are choosing to retire before the age of 65.
- **Declining birthrates** – fewer young people are available to enter the labour market.
- **Immigration needed** – skilled workers from other countries can face barriers to having their qualifications accepted when seeking employment.
- **New jobs, new skills** – in all industries, the new jobs being created are skilled jobs, most requiring some form of post-secondary education.
- **Competition in a global labour market** – as many countries face labour shortages, employers find they are competing with other countries, not just companies, in finding and keeping good workers.

What's a business owner to do? If you are an employer faced with these circumstances, you have difficult decisions to make. Will you need to hire underqualified people, or, increase the responsibilities or workload of your current staff? New, less labour intensive technology might offer some relief,

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[1] Canadian Federation of Independent Business, "Our Members' Opinions" Survey #24-51, 1989-2002.

[2] The Conference Board of Canada, *Performance and Potential*, 2000-2001.

[3] Canadian Federation of Independent Business, "Our Members' Opinions" Survey #51, 2002.

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but this option, like the others, comes back to the same requirement: *employee development*. Somehow, you are going to need to find a way to be sure that employees can work well and safely, can manage the new workload, and can adapt to new information and technology.

Proven benefits for business

Why should you put time and money into developing the skills of your employees? The bottom line is *your* bottom line: employee development in the form of skills training and education is shown to have a real return on investment for companies, with tangible, measurable benefits, including:

- better margins
- increased customer satisfaction
- a competitive edge
- stronger sales performances
- reduced errors or defects
- lower turnover (resulting in lower recruitment costs)
- fewer accidents
- improved compliance with government regulations and internal procedures
- increased productivity
- opportunity to take advantage of new technologies
- fewer grievances
- improved employee morale, staff relationships
- more loyal employees
- ability to expand and grow the business
- more freedom for the boss—competent employees can manage while you are away!

Employee training pays dividends big time. Our injuries are way down, we have more well-rounded, happy employees.

—HR manager, construction company, Calgary

The original outlay in training was expensive, but we began seeing returns in the first year and now, after a couple of years, we get it back three-fold... We've had financial institutions take note of our training and see it as a good indicator of the kind of business we are. We landed one very big client in part because of the quality of our training program.

—Welding contractor, Rocky Mountain House

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The real cost of employee turnover

If you think employee development is expensive, try employee turnover. Research shows that a small business can spend the equivalent of three full weeks of time on informal training for one new hire. A common estimate is that recruiting, hiring and orientation for one new employee will cost you between 70 and 200 per cent of that person's annual salary!

Think about what employee turnover is costing you.

Direct costs:

- termination
- vacancy
- recruitment
- selection and hiring
- orientation and training.

Indirect costs:

- lost productivity of the worker
- lost productivity of co-workers or subordinates
- lost productivity of the supervisor during vacancy, orientation and training
- lost productivity of the new hire during transition.
- increased defects or operating errors
- dissatisfied or lost customers during vacancy or transition.

Finders & Keepers: Recruitment and retention strategies includes blank templates and completed samples to help you calculate your turnover costs. See the *Resources* section at the end of this publication for more detail.

Countering common arguments

The following quotes represent some common arguments used by employers for not investing in employee development. The responses are suggested by best practices research and various industry representatives in the Alberta business community.

"If I develop my employees' skills, they'll walk out the door to another employer."

- Research shows that those who train, retain. Employers who offer opportunities for skills development are shown to have lower levels of employee turnover.
- It is a mobile but "internal" workforce, i.e. workers may change jobs but generally stay in the same industry, and so you're also likely to benefit from a worker trained by a competitor.

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- Enhanced skills are shown to benefit the worker, the worker's family and the community, because the worker is more efficient and productive. This helps the worker bring more money into the community, while feeling less personal stress and reducing the need for overtime.

> *Yes, they may leave. But you might just win yourself an employee that stays with you for a long time, and while they are with you, they will do a better job.*
>
> *—General manager, hotel, Banff*

"Employee development is too expensive. I don't have time to train..."

- Formal training is not the only way to employee development. This book highlights a range of options that need not cost a dime, including job enrichment, job enlargement, lateral moves and cross-training.
- "Expensive" is a relative term. Employee development may cost a fraction of the financial or personal costs of lost-time accidents, damaged equipment or unsatisfied customers.
- Many of your competitors disagree—recent research shows that despite rising costs, almost half of small- to medium-sized businesses expect to increase the amount of training they offer in the next three years.

> *I've got equipment that will kill you if you mishandle it. I have molds that if you drop one you lose five grand. What costs me more money than training is when someone hasn't got the training and they don't finish it properly and then we ship it across North America and then have to ship it back—that costs me more money than the part is worth.*
>
> *—Owner, manufacturing company, Crossfield*
>
> *You are going to spend it anyway—in lost-time accidents, WCB claims, replacing people. It's better to spend it on the front end than lose it on the back end.*
>
> *—District manager, construction company, Calgary*
>
> *If you don't train you may as well pack it in, because you're just looking for an accident or a breakdown. If I lose one day's work it takes me a week to earn it back.*
>
> *—Owner, seismic drilling company, Spirit River*

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"Employee development is not my responsibility."

- An estimated 50 per cent of the workforce of 2015 is already in the labour market and there are a shrinking number of young people poised to enter the workforce. This means there are not enough graduates to meet the demand for skilled workers.
- Employee development is a shared responsibility. Skills, like physical health, follow the "use it or lose it" principle, and the workplace is shown to be the primary venue for exercising those skills and developing new ones. If this responsibility is left to third party institutions or personal initiative (and finances), worker productivity will suffer.
- More than half of small business owners feel that responsibility for development of employee skills rests with them, and some of your competitors are likely to be among them.

If I look at companies that have invested in employee development, I see workers who are more confident and self-assured in their roles. Not only at work but also in the community. With that confidence grows their self-esteem and their willingness to become more active in their own communities.

—Business agent, union local, bakery sector, Calgary

You don't have any choice but to do training when it comes to safety and using specialized equipment. It's all hands-on here—they aren't going to learn this anywhere else.

—Co-owner, mulching company, Fairview

"No schools in my area provide the kind of training we need."

- Some very technical or specialized training may not be readily available locally. In this case you may need to send someone farther away to get training or set up your own program with in-house trainers. When it comes to in-house training, Alberta's post-secondary institutions have a lot to offer. They have courses for evaluating your company's needs, the design of training programs, developing course materials and train-the-trainer. Some institutions will design and present training programs upon request.
- Industry associations and sector councils are increasingly involved in training support, and if they do not offer it, they can often refer you to local resources.

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- The EDinfo website at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/edinfo** offers an extensive database of educational and training programs available on-site or through distance learning from Alberta-based public and private colleges, universities, university colleges, technical institutes and private vocational schools licensed or registered in Alberta.
- Visit **www.schoolfinder.com** for information on more than 1,400 universities, colleges and career colleges in Canada, including admission requirements, costs, programs and contact details.
- The Business Link is another great resource for employers, offering information, a resource library, small business seminars and advice from management consultants. Contact them toll-free in Alberta at 1-800-272-9675 or visit the website at **www.cbsc.org/alberta**.
- Alberta Advanced Education works with the 83 Community Adult Learning Councils to provide a range of programs across the province. Councils offer non-credit learning opportunities to adults in English as a Second Language, French as a Second Language, literacy and employability enhancement and community issues. Councils respond to their communities' unique learning needs and are a place to find information on local learning opportunities. Click the Community Based Adult Learning website link at **www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca**

We have a very specialized process here—you can't take a course in what we do. We set up a training committee with a supervisor, several employees and myself. Then we partnered with (a local technical institute) to develop a course for us. The employees are developing their skills by working as subject matter experts and we get a course that is tailored to our needs.

—Human resources manager, manufacturing company, Calgary

We have an annual conference and trade show that is very well attended, and we offer seminars in addition to the conference if a need becomes evident. There is a lot happening at the local level. Local associations will hold a series of builder breakfasts and the topic might be best practices in construction framing or whatever and those kind of quick hit, do-it-over-breakfast-type sessions work well.

—Executive director, industry association, construction, Edmonton

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"If their skills improve, they'll want a raise."

- Employee development is shown to lead to increased productivity and decreased operating costs, which results in greater profits and, therefore, the ability to pay more.
- Not every person is motivated by financial compensation—many employees see skills development as its own reward. Many employers plan on this and use it as an incentive, in addition to tying promotions and improved performance to pay increases.

> *Because our workers were more skilled, we were able to do jobs faster, so we were more profitable, so we could pay them more...*
>
> *—Welding contractor, Rocky Mountain House*

"I don't know how to develop the skills of my employees."

- This book is a good place to start, but the best place to start is by talking to your employees—ask them what they think they need in the way of training and how they might prefer to receive that training.

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Analyse: Know the Needs

What the business needs

Where is your business going? What are the goals, targets, plans or changes that you are working towards in the next year? In the next five years? In the unlikely event that the answer to these questions is "the status quo" you will still need to do some employee development to handle routine turnover.

Any type of change to a company's way of doing business can signal the need for employee development. Consider it if you expect to change:

- technology (e.g. computers, machinery)
- products
- markets
- organizational structure (e.g. self-managed teams, open book management)
- regulations (e.g. occupational health and safety, employment standards)
- quality control measures
- record-keeping or documentation
- audits (e.g. quality, safety)
- policies or procedures
- sources of labour (e.g. new employer coming into the community is expected to attract some of your workers or increase your competition for recruitment).

How do you find the information to answer these questions? Much will depend on the size of your operation. If you are the owner of a small business, you may be the one who can answer all of these questions. If yours is a bigger operation, you may need to do some digging by:

- interviewing managers or supervisors
- contacting regulating bodies about anticipated changes
- researching labour market information (see references in the *Resources* section)
- reviewing wage and salary information (see the WAGEinfo website at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/wageinfo**)
- contacting your local chamber of commerce or small business representative
- interviewing or surveying workers (e.g. employee satisfaction surveys may give you a clue about the reasons for employee turnover).

What the job needs

At a minimum, you should have a basic job description for each position. These usually include:

- title
- purpose
- reporting relationships
- major job tasks
- entry qualifications.

If you do not have job descriptions or you want to have a more detailed description, you can do a job analysis. Steps in analysing a job:

- **Identify the job(s)** you are going to analyse.
- **Let your employees know** why you are doing this.
- **Decide what you want to include and prepare a template.** How detailed do you want to be? What do you want to include or focus on? The job analysis can include whatever responsibilities or features you want to focus on. Some examples follow in the templates samples.
- **Decide how you will collect the data.** This will depend on your resources, your expertise and the type of template you have chosen. You will need to consider:
    - who you need to talk to: workers, direct supervisors, union representatives, customers
    - what information currently exists: job descriptions, work logs or records, employee handbooks
    - what information you need to collect
    - how best to collect that information: structured interviews, job shadowing, written surveys.
- **Collect and verify the data and record or communicate the results.**
- **Think about the future, too.** You may want to add a section on future skills—what is anticipated in the coming years that may impact the skills required for this position, e.g. emerging technology.

When reviewing the following samples, give some thought to what elements you might want to analyse for a particular job or jobs in your organization.

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A People/Data/Things Analysis

This approach divides tasks into three categories: those dealing with people (e.g. conduct interviews, serve customers, manage staff, present seminars), with data (e.g. analyse reports, process orders, enter numbers, document details), and with things (e.g. operate machinery, transport product, decorate displays, clean rooms). This type of job analysis might look something like the one below.

Job Title: Server
Date: _____

People	Data	Things
Greet customers; show them to their table	Record customer orders	Clean table
Describe daily specials	Create customer bills	Set tables
Take customers' orders	Process payment	Restock cutlery, napkins

OCCinfo at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/occinfo** provides up-to-date profiles for more than 500 occupations in Alberta, including information about duties, working conditions, personal characteristics, educational requirements and salary.

The federal government has detailed skills profiles for hundreds of occupations at **www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/English/general/default.asp**. These profiles outline the essential skills (e.g. reading, writing, oral communication) required for each occupation.

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A Skills Analysis

In a skills analysis, you choose the skills that are important for you to profile and document—technical skills, essential skills (e.g. reading, writing, math) and people skills. The following profile documents some of the skills required for an operator in a furniture manufacturing plant.

Work Area: Wood Manufacturing	**Position:** Operator 1
Purpose of Job: To safely create high-quality components that meet quality standards, using the base cut machine, the table saw and the table router.	
Rating Guide: ☐ = Not Required ☒ = Basic Skill ■ = Advanced Skill	
Product and Company Knowledge ☒ Corporate Mission ■ Product Routing ☒ Wood/Veneers ☐ Laminates/Finishes ■ Raw Materials/Components/Products	- state or explain company mission statement - describe product routing throughout the plant - differentiate between order types - identify components and sequence of operation of the base cut machine, table saw and table router
Documentation ☒ Employment Administration forms ■ QA/ISO forms ■ Work Order ■ Production Matrix/Schedules ☒ Scale Drawings ☐ Edits/Shipping Tags	- ensure all QA forms are accurately and consistently filled out - complete daily work plan document in completed work and specified time points - follow the production matrix, scanning for pertinent job tasks
Computer Use ☐ E-mail ☐ Word Processing ☐ CNC Controls ☐ Design Tools	- computer use not typically required at this level

A Competency-Based Analysis

This type of analysis focuses on competencies. **Competencies are any attitude, skill, behaviour, motive or other personal characteristic that is essential to perform a job, or more importantly, differentiate superior performers from solid performers.** Competencies are typically defined and presented as a graduated series of levels of performance (e.g. basic to advanced). Required competencies for jobs and competencies that employees demonstrate are then rated against this framework, e.g. "This position requires an advanced level of competency in teamwork skills and the employee demonstrates intermediate skill." Since competency analysis can be complex, you may need to seek expert advice if you choose this option.

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The following competency description for communication is drawn from the Alberta Public Service Competency Model, available on-line at **www.pao.gov.ab.ca/learning/competencies/apscomp/aps-competencies.pdf**

Communication

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The **definition** for communication means **clearly conveying and receiving messages to meet the needs of all. This may involve listening, interpreting and delivering verbal, written, and/or electronic messages.**

Why is communication important? Effective communication allows us to maintain our competence through gaining understanding. Understanding is critical to ensure we obtain the desired results. Communication is critical to understand and respond effectively to people from diverse backgrounds. Listening carefully allows us to address underlying issues and create better client or internal relationships. Active listening and asking the right questions allows us to uncover and solve problems that might not always be obvious.

Expresses self effectively	Listens effectively	Understands underlying issues	Adapts communication for the situation
Communicates in a way that is accurate, timely, and easy to understand regardless of medium. Shares information in an open and honest way.	Probes to understand unexpressed or poorly expressed thoughts, concerns, or feelings. Reads body language, and other non-verbal cues accurately and uses that understanding to structure and give an appropriate response. Paraphrases information to check understanding before drawing conclusions.	Seeks to understand others' frame of reference. Understands why people behave in a certain way in given situations. Uses this information to better understand an individual or determine immediate communication needs. Responds to people's concerns in a manner that promotes long-term solutions.	Uses understanding of ongoing underlying issues to identify the most effective method of conveying information. Uses different ways of conveying a message to add clarity and meaning to communications. Understands information from receiver's perspective, anticipates others' response, and alters own behaviour to respond appropriately.

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> *Our jobs and our training are all based on competencies. We have three levels for assistants and three for operators. We started with industry recognized practices and then custom-built the competencies from there—as they perform tasks in the field their supervisor checks them off, and once completed they come in, take a training course (again, competency-based) and write an exam. Our guys are known as the highest skilled, best trained in the business.*
>
> *—Senior training manager, well control service, Red Deer*

What employees need

Once you know what the business needs and what the job needs, you can turn to what employees need to do their jobs. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are a key part of your workers' ability to do their jobs. Here are some things you can do to find out if a lack of skills is a concern:

- Ask your employees.
- Observe your employees.
- Talk to supervisors, co-workers and customers.
- Look at the evidence, including work results, records.
- Consider your employees' educational background.
- Have employees do a self-assessment.
- Conduct regular performance reviews.

It's important to remember that knowledge and skills are not the whole story. In addition to good skills, employees need:

- information about how to do the job
- clear direction about what is expected of them
- proper tools, equipment, space and time to do the job
- positive feedback when the job is done well
- supportive, corrective feedback when the job is not done well
- motivation to succeed and to do the job well.

Any of these factors can contribute to a gap between *what is* (how employees, and your business, are currently performing) and *what should be* (what you need or expect in terms of performance).

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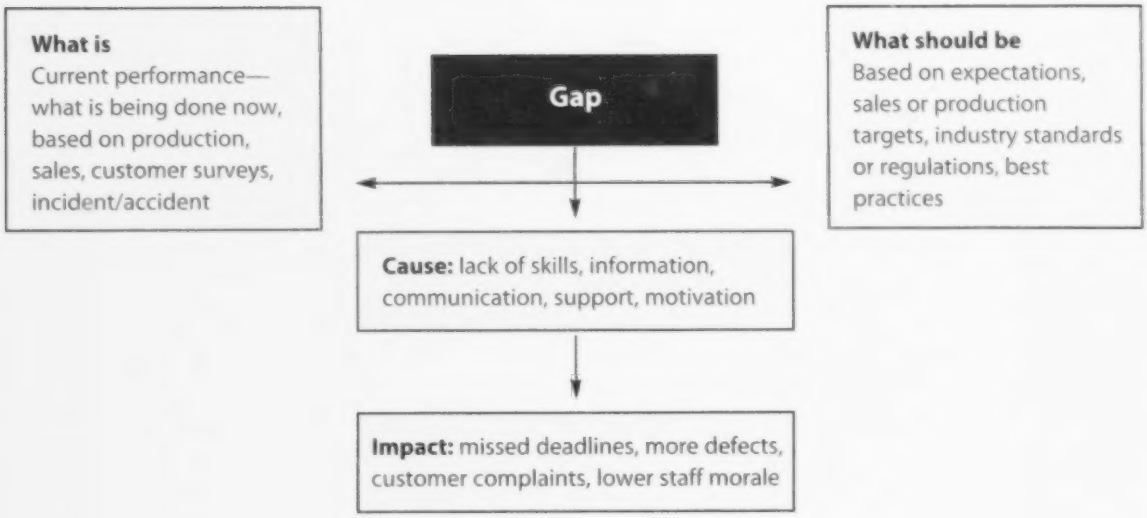
What is
Current performance—what is being done now, based on production, sales, customer surveys, incident/accident
Gap
What should be
Based on expectations, sales or production targets, industry standards or regulations, best practices
Cause: lack of skills, information, communication, support, motivation
Impact: missed deadlines, more defects, customer complaints, lower staff morale

Where are the gaps? (Do you really have a training problem?)

The needs assessment for the business and the job should identify the "what should be"—what is expected in terms of output, procedure and quality. You can figure out the "what is" by looking around, considering any measures you have to judge whether or not these expectations are being met. Things you might want to look at include:

- production or sales records
- customer surveys
- employee surveys
- incident or accident reports
- WCB claims
- audit results
- error or defect rates.

Once you have identified a gap in performance, you still have a few more questions to ask before deciding whether training or employee development is the answer. At this point you need to find out:

1. Is this gap due to a lack of skills or knowledge? It may be that employees are just out of practice or they have not been given enough feedback to understand what is expected of them.
2. Is the gap due to other factors? It may be that:
   - poor behaviour is rewarded (e.g. An employee might not report an injury because doing so would end a long string of unbroken days with no injuries, and thus put a performance bonus at risk.)

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- good performance is punished (e.g. some workers do not follow the proper procedures and mock those who do, fast workers have to help slow workers, resulting in more work for the faster employees)
- good performance does not matter (no feedback either way)
- obstacles (e.g. poor equipment, insufficient work space) prevent good performance.

If the performance gap is due to any of these other factors, no amount of employee development will solve the problem—you need to address the root cause in order to close the gap.

For food safety reasons, we require that employees dip their knives in a special solution for every so many cuts. They weren't doing it. Was this a training problem? An attitude problem? After watching and talking to them, we realized it was neither—they weren't doing it because the knife sheaths were spaced too far from their station, requiring them to take extra steps each time, which slowed them down. We put more knife sheaths on the line and the problem was solved.

—QA manager, meat packing plant, rural Alberta

What are your options?

Once you have identified the performance gaps that will benefit from some employee development, you can consider your options. The chapter Mobilize: Eight Great Ways to a Skilled Workforce contains practical tips and techniques to help you move forward. Take some time to review the options presented there and decide which one(s) will work for you. You will need to consider the:

- level of skills and education of your workers—how well are they at reading and writing, expressing themselves?
- learning styles of your workers—how do they learn best? Hands-on? Independent study? Group or one-on-one?
- expertise available to conduct employee development—do you or any of your current staff have the knowledge needed to conduct the necessary training? If you don't have it, is it available locally? Where else might you find the staff development skills?
- timing—consider work schedules, shift differences, peak periods and downtime when scheduling the training.

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- geography—will the location of learners be a factor?
- facilities—do you have a training room? If you are considering on-line learning, do you have computers? Do you have a quiet area for mentors to meet with employees?
- budget—have you considered the cost of the trainer, resource materials, course or job aid development, cover-off for workers during training?

A suggested guideline for a training budget is two to five per cent of your operating budget.

Many workers in our industry have limited English skills. Formal training or on-line courses weren't an option for us, and yet we had some important things to teach them regarding food safety and good manufacturing practices. We partnered with a local college to create high-visual, plain language resources (posters, spot-the-problem visuals) that cross any language barrier and any employer could use.

—Vice-President, industry association, agrifoods sector, Calgary

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Set up the systems

A successful employee development program will be clearly aligned with business goals and integrated with your other workplace plans or systems, such as recruitment or succession planning, performance management, compensation, and reward and recognition programs. Think about what supports will need to be in place to be sure employees know about the opportunities and know how to take advantage of them. Clearly written and communicated descriptions or policies are a good idea, as are written application forms and formal records of employee participation and progress.

Throughout the planning stage, aim for as much consultation and collaboration with employees as possible to make sure you create a system that meets everyone's needs. For more information on planning and operational ideas that help retain workers, get a copy of *Finders & Keepers: Recruitment and retention strategies*. You can download a copy on-line, free of charge, at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop** or order the publication by calling the Alberta Career Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-661-3753.

Seven years ago we partnered with the union to set up an on-site learning centre. We brought in a local community college to help us set up the centre and provide an instructor for course development and tutoring. It has been an absolute success. We started with computer training and moved into courses in math, problem solving, running meetings, taking minutes and filling out reports. Some were courses we requested, while others were employee requests. All of it has worked to help our employees be independent and successful in managing their works areas, so it's win-win.

—Human resources manager, brewery, Edmonton

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Principles of Adult Learning

When you are going through the process of planning the details of a development program there are some principles that are common to creating any good learning environment. Adults learn best when:

- the environment is non-threatening: there is a good rapport with the instructor, questions and discussion are encouraged, everyone has a chance to participate
- they see the point: they know why they should learn this, how it applies to them, how it applies to their work, how they will benefit
- their experience is recognized and valued: they are encouraged to share their experiences, demonstrate what they know and learn from each other
- they are involved in the learning process: questions are welcomed, there is lots of practice and application of the content, limited use of lecturing
- learning progresses in a logical manner: through sequential steps (first, second, third) or from simple to complex
- a variety of learning styles are used: a balance of listening, doing, watching, interacting, experiencing
- learning is enjoyable: the mood is kept relaxed, personal anecdotes and humour are used and a creative atmosphere is maintained.

Set SMART objectives

Any employee development plan needs to begin with well-formed objectives. These will be clear statements of what you want employees to know or do as a result of the coaching, job enrichment, training or other learning activity you have planned. Whether you are defining objectives for your employee development program as a whole, for a training program, or for individual employees, good objectives should be SMART:

- **S**pecific—what will be achieved?
- **M**easurable—how will you know if you achieve the objective?
- **A**chievable—is it attainable, given your resources, skills and time?
- **R**elevant—does it meet the needs of the learners, the job, the goals of the business?
- **T**ime-framed—when will the process begin? When will it end?

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Here are some examples of learning objectives for companies considering employee development programs. Look through them and consider how each one meets the SMART criteria for good objectives. They can serve as good examples for writing your own SMART objectives.

For a *business*:

- We will increase our market share by 30 per cent by March 2005.
- By the end of this quarter, we will produce 30,000 units per shift with no more than 10 per cent defects.
- Our next customer satisfaction survey will show a 20 per cent improvement in overall ratings.
- The order department will reduce the average processing time by two hours before May 31 and three hours by the end of the year.

For an *employee development program*:

- All employees will complete the worksite orientation within five days of commencing employment.
- As part of the annual performance review, each employee will identify three personal learning goals and one strategy to meet each goal within the coming year.
- One worker on every shift will be certified in First Aid.
- At any point in time, two bar service staff will be cross-trained and able to serve on the front desk.
- A competency checklist will be prepared for each position in the department within two months' time.

For a *training program*:

- Upon completion of this course participants will be able to safely operate a drill press, following standard procedure.
- Upon completion of the on-the-job coaching session, the employee will demonstrate their ability to process a customer order within a five-minute time frame and with 90 per cent accuracy.
- 85 per cent of participants will rate the course as satisfactory or better.
- Every participant will complete a follow-up evaluation three months after training.

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For an *employee*:

- I will research and complete a course in PowerPoint before my next performance review.
- I will complete two days of cross-training in shipping before my summer holidays.
- I will earn my journeyman ticket within two years of starting work as a second year apprentice.

Recognize and reward employee development

"What's in it for me?" It's a fair question, and one that each one of us asks, consciously or unconsciously, when deciding whether to do or not do something. It is part of human nature to need to know "why."

If you are asking your workers to change, improve or learn, you will want to make sure they can answer this question in a positive way. Good employers understand this need and make sure that they provide and communicate clear, positive reasons for and recognition of high quality work and employee development.

As you consider what you can offer, remember that motivation is a personal thing. What "gets you up in the morning" may be very different from the next person. Consult with your workers to find out what would be meaningful to them. The answers might surprise you. Monetary rewards, for example, might be valued less than respect and appreciation. Whether they are formal or informal, good rewards are:

- **personal**—tailored to and valued by the recipient, not one-size fits all
- **descriptive**—clearly communicates what actions or performance are being rewarded
- **lasting**—something useful, e.g. a desk lamp that will hold its value
- **public**—recognized formally or informally in front of co-workers or customers
- **symbolic**—representative of the company and tied to the action being recognized
- **fair**—in what performance is recognized, in who gets recognized, in the value of the gift

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- **known**—clear communication of what performance will be rewarded, and how
- **sometimes spontaneous**—surprises can delight more than planned recognition
- **timely**—closely connected to the event or action being recognized
- **irrevocable**—once given, it can never be withdrawn.

Sign up the supervisors

Direct supervisors play a critical role in the success of any employee development program. No matter how good the plan or how committed the company, it will be the direct supervisor who has the greatest influence on the willingness of employees to participate in skills development. *"Is training really important here?" "If I ask for training will they think I have poor skills?" "She says she wants me to be a mentor, but she won't give us half an hour a week to meet."* Walking the talk is critical at this point, and your supervisors need to be given the training, coaching, back-up and resources to support and promote employee skills development.

> *Training for supervisors is critical. Some say it takes years to become a journeyman and one day to become a supervisor. The reality is you have to provide skills development at that level to succeed.*
>
> *—CEO, industry association, construction sector, Edmonton*

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Mobilize: Eight Great Ways to a Skilled Workforce

1. Training

The basics of good design

Any training program should follow a basic development cycle:

- **analyse**—performance gaps, training needs, available resources, learning styles of participants, current performance data
- **design**—delivery format, training schedule, objectives, evaluation tools
- **develop**—course and evaluation materials, learning activities, lesson plans
- **deliver**—training program (pilot first, if possible)
- **evaluate**—during the process, when completed, for short-term and long-term.

Getting results from training

We've all done it—taken training that we enjoyed and seemed useful. Then a few months later it is all gone, somehow lost from memory. If you are going to invest in training for your employees you want to make sure that it translates into positive, lasting changes on the job.

Three people play a big role in this learning transfer: the trainer, the manager (owner or supervisor) and the trainee. This happens at three key stages: before, during and after the training. The following chart summarizes practical things you can do to maximize the benefit of your training investment.

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Make Sure the Learning Transfers!

Who	Before Training	During Training	After Training
Trainer	❑ Do a needs assessment to identify needs and resources for training ❑ Involve supervisors, trainees and union representatives in program development ❑ Follow good instructional design process, including interactive action learning ❑ Plan objectives based on performance standards ❑ Align course objectives with business objectives ❑ Collect authentic workplace materials and case studies to use in the course ❑ Communicate with trainees to prepare and motivate them to learn	❑ Answer the "what's in it for me" question ❑ Acknowledge and use the skills and experience of participants as a resource ❑ Give individualized feedback ❑ Provide job aids ❑ Use activities based on real examples from the workplace ❑ Coach and discuss ways to apply this learning to the job, and how to keep it fresh ❑ Communicate details of the process to supervisors e.g. objectives, activities and follow-up plans ❑ Include peer coaching	❑ Conduct an immediate evaluation by participants, including assessment of learning and plans to apply the learning ❑ Create a "performance contract"—employees write down five actions they will take to change their performance based on their learning—follow up later or e-mail it to them as a reminder ❑ Provide follow-up coaching or refresher sessions, if needed ❑ Do follow-up evaluations e.g. three months later, six months later

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Make Sure the Learning Transfers!

Who	Before Training	During Training	After Training
Supervisor	❑ Participate in the needs assessment ❑ Select trainees carefully; encourage full attendance and participation ❑ Provide a positive training environment ❑ Plan to create methods to help workers retain the knowledge and skills they learn ❑ Build accountability for transfer into performance reviews ❑ Provide advance information, orientation to lead hands or co-workers about training purpose and content ❑ Review and approve course content, materials ❑ Align training with business plans and goals and with other systems (performance review, recruitment) ❑ Allow time for pre-course assignments ❑ Plan and communicate rewards for demonstrated new behaviours ❑ Send co-workers to training together ❑ Collect baseline data about performance	❑ Speak at the first session to welcome participants and thank them for attending ❑ Communicate the importance of this course for the company and the support and appreciation of senior management ❑ Prevent interruptions ❑ Ensure adequate cover-off of participant's work duties ❑ Attend course completion, award certificates	❑ Debrief the trainer ❑ Recognize and reinforce achievement personally (e.g. positive feedback or letter) ❑ Plan for re-entry (e.g. immediate opportunities to apply learning; tools, time and support for transfer) ❑ Follow up with trainees later at specific times, to evaluate success training program ❑ Accept or assign responsibility (e.g. to foreman, team lead) to monitor effective transfer ❑ Provide mentor or coach ❑ Support trainee "reunions" ❑ Publicize successes, celebrate small wins, reward performance improvement ❑ Collect post-training performance data to measure improvement
Trainee	❑ Provide input to program planning ❑ Participate in pre-training activities (e.g. pre-reading; self-assessment) ❑ Set your own objectives—what you hope to learn	❑ Link with a buddy or supportive group of learners ❑ Actively participate ❑ Anticipate forgetting some of what you learn, so plan ways to help you retain most of the knowledge and skills	❑ Review training notes ❑ Teach someone else ❑ Meet with a mentor or coach ❑ Maintain contact with course participants

Adapted with permission by Hammond & Associates Inc., Calgary, Alberta. Originally published in *Transfer of Training: Action-Packed Strategies to Ensure High Payoff from Training Investments*, by Mary L. Broad and John W. Newstrom, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1992, Reading, MA, USA.

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I had a client in manufacturing that wanted to get a head start on computer skills training. As part of the needs assessment we surveyed staff about former training. Turned out that 83 per cent of the employees forgot that they had taken a course in Statistical Process Control the year before! Why? Because the company, trying to be proactive, brought in the training a year in advance of when workers would actually be using SPC. The company learned from this and decided not to do computer training until the computers were actually in the plant.

—Training consultant, Calgary

Whenever we send someone to a training seminar we expect them to come back and teach us and others what they have learned. That way, we all benefit.

—Owner, flower shop, Edmonton

Orientation training

Learning in a workplace usually begins with an employee orientation. This is where new employees learn how things work, where things are, who's who and what role they will play on your team. Take this opportunity to do more than the paperwork.

In addition to efficiently completing the necessary administrative matters a good orientation will:

- welcome new employees
- communicate the values of the organization
- be consistent with the expressed values of the company
- communicate workplace expectations and standards
- model expected behaviour
- instill confidence and pride in the job
- provide an opportunity for questions
- create a good first impression
- build rapport
- paint the whole picture
- explain the importance of the employee's contribution
- involve senior management, line supervisors
- provide an opportunity for ongoing follow-up.

Make sure your orientation includes:

- the history, values and mission of the company
- an overview of your products or services and your customers

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- the organizational structure
- a facility tour
- introductions to co-workers, key contacts
- a list of policies and procedures, e.g. sick leave, training policy
- a job description
- salary and wage information, including benefits.

On-the-job training

On-the-job training or coaching—with a trainer, supervisor or co-worker providing instruction right at the workstation (as opposed to in a training room)—is the primary method of training in most workplaces. On-the-job training provides an immediate connection between learning and the work. This works especially well when the equipment, tools or process cannot be easily removed, replicated or practiced in another place.

First and foremost, effective on-the-job training needs to start with the right person as the trainer. Knowing how to do the job or task is just one of the qualifications of a good on-the-job trainer. In addition, trainers need:

- good communication skills
- the ability to act as a positive role model
- respect and empathy for the learner
- knowledge and skill in how to train. (See the *Train-the-trainer* section for more on this.)

Even though on-the-job training is often referred to as informal training, it still requires careful preparation and support to be done well. Clear objectives should be set for what the trainee will be able to do, how they will demonstrate what they have done, and to what standard. For example: "Upon completion of the training session, the employee will run the machine through four cycles, unaided, with no mistakes."

One of the key challenges for an on-the-job trainer is to know when to stop. Too much information in one session may be overwhelming. It is good to put some thought into this ahead of time and to sort out what the trainee must know, what is nice to know and what is useful, but not crucial, information. Focus on the "must know," and consider if the "nice to knows" and "helpful information" can wait for another day.

The training (and the learning) will be more consistent if a training checklist is prepared to guide the trainer in what to cover. Provide space for notes about what was covered, how the trainee did and any follow-up that may be required.

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> *A lot of people we hire come with a basic set of skills and courses, but we still need to do our own training. We need them to learn on our machines and understand our way of doing things.*
>
> *—Drilling contractor, Grand Prairie*

Classroom training

Classroom training is certainly something we all have experienced. Think about the best teacher you ever had. What made them great in your eyes? Then think about the worst group training you ever experienced. What went wrong? The answers to both questions hold some important clues for effective classroom instruction.

Effective group training, whether it is in-house or off-site, whether it is a short seminar or a course that last weeks or months, should be based on sound planning and presentation principles. These include:

- respect for adult learning principles (see page 21)
- clear definition and communication of SMART objectives (see page 21)
- task analysis (breaking the topic down into manageable components) and logical sequencing of learning points
- icebreaker activities that put people at ease and prepare them for learning
- active learning strategies (e.g. case studies, debates, discussions) that engage the learner rather than passive learning (e.g. lectures)
- activities that suit a range of learning styles (e.g. role play, group discussion, lecture, demonstration, audiovisual)
- activities suited to the needs and skills of the learners
- a plan to transfer the learning back to the job
- appropriate, well-organized materials
- effective techniques for asking questions (and answering them!)
- ongoing monitoring (changing topics or tactics, if necessary) to ensure the learners are still "with you" and the group dynamics are positive
- an appropriate learning environment (e.g. appropriate space, lighting, tools, minimal distractions).

We remember:

20 per cent of what we hear

30 per cent of what we see

50 per cent of what we see and hear

70 per cent of what we see, hear and discuss

90 per cent of what we see, hear, discuss and touch/manipulate.

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E-learning

While there are many different definitions of e-learning they usually contain certain common elements:

- using electronic means to deliver training or educational information
- the means can include computers, cell phones, audio or video tape, CD-ROM discs or satellite TV
- computers can be used on a standalone basis or be connected to other computers.

How e-learning is used can take many forms, including:

- blended learning—traditional face-to-face plus on-line learning
- real time (synchronous) on-line learning—learners are on-line at the same time (e.g. on-line chat or audio/video conferencing)
- asynchronous on-line learning—learners log on at different times (e.g. e-mail, self-paced courses)
- self-paced CD-ROM learning.

There are pros and cons to e-learning. Some advantages include:

- the learner has more control over such things as the pace of moving through the program
- 24-7 access
- increased flexibility
- greater consistency or standardization of training
- learning materials are easily updated
- being able to build tracking mechanisms into the training program, to monitor the progress of the learner
- possibly cheaper delivery costs
- great variety of options.

If you are thinking of using e-learning, keep in mind there are some disadvantages, such as:

- customization of programs is not as readily available and can be expensive to develop in-house
- technical troubles can occur
- it requires a degree of technical savvy and confidence on the part of your employees
- not being well-suited where language or literacy barriers exist
- the initial costs to develop and establish the required infrastructure can be significant
- it reduces networking opportunities and shared learning experiences, because workers may be working alone at a computer.

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Is e-learning right for your business? It might be, if:

- ✔ Employees are comfortable with the technology.
- ✔ Employees have access to the right technology such as hardware and software or, perhaps, high speed Internet connections.
- ✔ You have readily available information technology support.
- ✔ Your culture supports the use of technology.
- ✔ Management supports and models use of technology.
- ✔ You have (or can hire) the resources you need to develop or obtain and evaluate the materials.

Good ideas for setting up an e-learning system:

- Try it out yourself first, and then with some employees.
- Introduce it in small stages.
- Set aside a place for it, one that's distraction-free.
- Allow the employee to set aside time for e-learning, free of distractions.
- Beware of the bells and whistles (e.g. impressive or entertaining graphics do not guarantee good on-line learning design).

Want to know what courses are on-line in Alberta? Check out eCampusAlberta at **www.ecampusalberta.ca**. eCampusAlberta is a consortium of 15 colleges and technical institutes working together to provide learner access to on-line courses.

Train-the-trainer

Good trainers are made, not born. Even if you have someone with natural training abilities, you still need to provide them with the tools and coaching to do a consistently good job training your employees.

A train-the-trainer program should cover the content already explored in the *On-the-job training* and *Classroom training* sections of this publication, as well as the sections on setting SMART objectives and evaluation.

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2. Self-directed learning

Self-directed learning puts the employee in the driver's seat. The learner identifies the needs, sets the goals, researches the options, chooses the methods and evaluates the progress.

There are many reasons why you might choose self-directed learning as a training option. Self-directed learning:

- puts the learner in control
- recognizes that not all people learn the same way
- focuses on outcomes (demonstrated competence) while allowing the employee to choose how those skills are acquired
- some programs permit flexibility by allowing learners of different levels of skill or knowledge to begin training at their current level
- is well-suited for independent, self-motivated people
- encourages personal responsibility and ownership
- is often more cost-effective
- helps develop skills in setting goals, identifying options and evaluating outcomes.

Self-directed learning, when it is going to be recognized or supported by an employer, needs to have some structures in place to assist both the employer and the employee in setting and meeting clear goals. One of the most common elements is a learning plan, which is also known as a learning contract or personal development plan. Learning contracts usually address these key issues:

- What will be achieved?
- How will it be achieved?
- Where will it be done?
- When will it start and end?
- Who will be involved?
- Who needs to agree to the plan?

Sample Learning and Development Plan

A learning and development plan supports current and future needs of the organization as well as current and future goals of employees. The plan may include enhancing current knowledge and skills and developing knowledge and skills for the future, related to the current role or to career development goals.

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The following sample learning and development plan is just one of the resources in the Alberta Public Service Learning and Development Toolkit, available at **www.pao.gov.ab.ca/toolkit/**

Name:	Title:	Department:

Learning and development goal:

What action will I take to achieve this goal?	Timelines	How will I know I've been successful?	Who will I get feedback from?
(Consider both on-the-job and formal learning initiatives)			

Individual's commitment		Date:
Supervisor's support	Signature:	Date:

All of our staff complete Teacher Professional Growth Plans, where they set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) goals for each year and identify how they intend to meet those goals. We meet in January to review their progress and evaluate if we need to change anything or what support they might need in meeting that target. Then we meet again in June to review if and how the goals were met. Not everybody reaches every goal but that's okay—the learning plan gives them focus and something to aim for, and we always learn from the process.

—Principal, public high school, Coaldale

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3. Coaching and mentoring

While coaching and mentoring are often used to mean the same thing, there are differences depending on whom you talk to. Coaching is often short-term, focused on a specific challenge or problem. For example, an employee might be assigned a coach following a training program to make sure they can practice and apply what they learned. Or they might be coached while learning the ropes in a new position.

Mentoring, which tends to be long-term, is a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a less skilled or experienced person. For example, a mentor might act as a guide, advisor and counsellor at various stages in a person's career.

Coaching and mentoring have many demonstrated benefits for workplaces in:

- quality and quantity of work
- employee development
- employee problem-solving ability
- transfer of learning
- supervisor/employee communication
- employee self-esteem
- employee interest in their work.

Companies wishing to set up formal mentoring or coaching programs need to:

- make a good match—good "chemistry" in terms of a positive relationship between the two individuals
- ensure the coach or mentor has the right skills. In addition to knowledge of the content, the coach or mentor needs to be:
    - a people person
    - a good communicator (actively listens, asks relevant questions, clearly conveys information)
    - an effective role model or example
    - good at motivating others, is supportive
    - trusted and discreet
    - open-minded (willing to consider new ideas or approaches).
- provide time, and appropriate privacy, for the coaching or mentoring session
- establish timelines and goals for the mentoring or coaching relationship.

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> *We have permanent trainers who serve as field coaches in the summer and they make sure that what the employees learned in the classroom is applied in the field. It's not done as an audit, it's done more as a friend, where they can say, "You taught me how to use this but I can't remember." It really works well.*
>
> *—Training co-ordinator, natural gas distribution company, Edmonton*

4. Moving up: Employee promotion

Promoting someone to a position of greater responsibility is a time-honoured way of rewarding good performance, developing employee skills and retaining valued employees. The potential for job advancement is often identified as a key element of what employees are looking for in a job.

When considering promoting an employee, it is important to:

- Do it for the right reasons (demonstrated competence, for example, not because you like them as a person or you fear that they might leave).
- Level the playing field. Make sure all employees know the criteria you use in promoting someone, and allow as many as possible to strive for that goal.
- Analyse what is required for the new role and consider if your candidate has demonstrated abilities or potential in those key areas. Recognize that being successful in one role does not guarantee success in the new role.
- Identify and address the gaps. Supervisory positions, especially, often require a whole new range of skills for managing people, paper and processes. Make sure you know what tasks may be a challenge for the newly promoted employee and provide support through training, coaching or mentoring.
- Manage new working relationships. A promotion may mean that the employee is now supervising people who were, up until now, peers or friends. Training and support in managing this transition is important.
- Pay attention to refusals or resignations. If someone turns down a promotion or resigns after taking one, try to find out why and learn from it. You may need to reconsider your selection criteria, whether the pay and benefits are worth the added responsibility or how you handled the promotion process.

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> *The way it works here is everyone, no matter who, starts on carry-out, bagging groceries and helping customers to their cars. You have to do that for four months and then you earn the right to apply for some of the inside positions, like stocking shelves or working in the butcher shop. It's a good deal, I guess. We all learn the importance of everybody's job and you have to prove yourself first before they train you for more responsibility.*
>
> —*Bagger, grocery store, Edmonton*

5. Moving within: Job enrichment

Job enrichment is adding to or changing tasks in a job to increase the employee's authority or responsibility. This is a "vertical" expansion of the job, as opposed to job enlargement, which is a "horizontal" expansion (adding more duties at a similar level of skill or responsibility). Where job enlargement adds diversity or change, which broadens the job and limits boredom or carelessness through over confidence, job enrichment adds authority, accountability, degree of difficulty and specialization. Examples of job enrichment activities include committee work, special assignments or projects, and serving on cross-functional teams.

Job enrichment has been demonstrated to increase interest and motivation in the job, allowing employees to try new skills, develop new relationships and explore some areas of interest or specialization.

Best practices for job enrichment:

- Involve employees in the decision-making process by discussing how the job(s) will be enriched.
- Ensure the job is truly enriched, not just adding more work, by building in increased authority, accountability and control for the employee.
- Make it voluntary—not everyone may be interested in the new job responsibilities you are proposing.
- Give the employee time and support to manage their new tasks.

6. Moving around: Job rotation and cross-training

Job rotation is temporarily moving employees into another job or through a range of jobs. A job rotation can last several hours or several months. A job rotation may be an effective way to:

- broaden the person's knowledge and appreciation of other functions or work units
- prepare an individual for career advancement
- motivate, challenge, or add diversity and interest
- avoid repetitive strain injuries or alleviate physical fatigue or stress
- modify physical requirements for an employee, e.g. when recovering from an injury or illness
- rejuvenate work units by adding new ideas and input
- facilitate communication and support between work units
- facilitate succession planning.

Cross-training is a form of job rotation with one specific purpose: to train the employee in how to do another job safely and well. Both job rotation and cross training provide the employer with a more flexible workforce, facilitating scheduling and cover-off in handling absenteeism or holiday relief. Job rotation works for people or in work environments where immersion in the job is the best way to learn.

Best practices for job rotation programs:

- Use a job rotation as a reward for good performance.
- Consult with employees and union representatives when planning a job rotation.
- Link the job rotation to organizational goals.
- Link the job rotation to the employee's learning or career goals.
- Establish guidelines for what jobs employees may move into, considering such things as ergonomic requirements and tools or equipment requirements.
- Establish clear expectations and learning goals for the job rotation and follow-up to ensure these are met.
- Set a time limit for the rotation.
- Allow sufficient time and support for orientation into the new position.
- Allow sufficient time for the employee to do the job well.
- If planning a job rotation for ergonomic reasons, ensure the employee is moving into a job that does not present the same ergonomic stressors.
- Accept the costs: and know that temporary reductions in productivity may result.

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- Manage the risks: employees who are not properly prepared or trained to take on the new job may injure themselves or co-workers or damage equipment.

> *If I have a guy who can run the drill and he has his Class 1 license, I can save myself one guy, because otherwise I need to put two people on that job—one to drive the truck and one to do the work. So I save money and he gets more work. We both win.*
>
> *—Owner, seismic drilling company, Spirit River*

7. Moving over: Lateral moves

A lateral move involves changing jobs, but to one similar in pay, status or level of responsibility as opposed to one with more pay or responsibility.

A lateral move can be the right move for an employee who is seeking new challenges or skills. That employee may want to stay with the company but move out of the unit or type of work they are in, or may want new challenges but not necessarily increased hours or responsibility. Lateral moves benefit companies by increasing the flexibility and communication or understanding between individuals and work units. It is an option that works especially well for small businesses that have few top slots available but want to keep valued employees who might otherwise leave.

Companies can make lateral moves a success by:

- offering or promoting them, or being receptive to this option
- making sure there is a good fit between what the employee is seeking and what the new position offers
- allowing workers to test the waters first, through job rotation or job shadowing
- learning the motives for the move. For example, if an employee wants to escape a certain work environment or supervisor, this is information you may need to know.

8. Job aids and written information

Sometimes all that is needed is an effective job aid. Job aids include checklists, worksheets, wallet cards, posters, pictures, code lists, flow charts and diagrams. An aid can be anything that provides on-the-spot practical help and is structured to help employees remember and use procedures.

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techniques or important information. By storing the useful information in a readily accessible format, job aids reduce the instructions or information employees need to recall or memorize and save them the time and trouble of looking up this information.

A job aid is a useful tool if:

- the procedure is complicated
- the risk or consequences of an error is great
- the task is not repeated often enough to become familiar
- employees can easily use and access it.

Good job aids:

- are clean, clear, a reasonable size and well laid out, with lots of white space around the content
- include graphics (e.g. diagrams, illustrations) where helpful
- are brief and written in plain language.

Employee handbooks and written procedures can also help employees learn and apply new skills. Like job aids, these need to be written and formatted with the reader clearly in mind, featuring plain language, a clean layout, generous type size and navigational tools to help the reader find his or her way around the document. Navigational tools might include a table of contents, index, clear headings or tabbed dividers, and a glossary of new or technical terms. Seek employees' input when developing this material and field-test it with some workers before you put handbooks or procedures to use.

Finally, access to printed information or on-line resources is important for supporting employee skills development. Consider devoting a bulletin board to employee development information or placing course calendars in the lunchroom. Appoint someone on staff to keep and post current information and publish helpful websites or contact information in the employee newsletter. The *Resource* section in this book is also a great place to start.

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Evaluate: Monitor Results, Measure Return

A good employee development program will build in evaluation at the ground floor. Why evaluate your employee development program? Employee development is a wise investment. If you are prepared to make that investment, you want to be sure that your employees and your business realize a good return on that investment.

A good evaluation program will help you:

- track and demonstrate employee skills development
- identify skills development gaps and future needs
- ensure your programs are meeting participants' needs
- make sure learning translates to on-the-job improvement
- ensure your employee development program continually improves through assessing training benefits and revising, if necessary, future training strategies
- establish the return on your investment.

Since we initiated this training program, we have seen a 50 per cent reduction in lost-time accidents. The length of time to train people from hire to operator level has been reduced by about a third. Our quality assurance issues (e.g. mechanical malfunction, operational problems) have been reduced by 70 per cent. Our maintenance costs are down…we get fewer callbacks from customers concerned about quality…we get more calls from companies complimenting us on the quality of the personnel we put out there…Finally, there is a very important one that is hard to put a number on, and that is the improvement in employee satisfaction. They have a structured program that takes them from inception to operator and they know the steps to take—we have removed the roadblocks for them. They are asking for more information and have more interest in training. That's a good measure, too.

—Health, safety and environment manager, well control service, Red Deer

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One of the most popular evaluation models is Kirkpatrick's, which presents four levels of evaluation—**reaction, learning, behaviour** and **results***. These four levels have been matched to typical types of information, tools and benefits of each level in the chart below:

(*Reprinted with permission of the publisher. From *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels* © 1994, Donald Kirkpatrick. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, CA., USA)

Level	Focus	Type of information	Tools	Benefits
1. Reaction	How did employees feel about the learning activity?	Trainee's satisfaction, their perceptions of the trainer, the facilities, the workshop	Post-training "smile sheets" along with feedback surveys from participants	Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the learning activity; quick, easy to administer and tabulate
2. Learning	What new knowledge or skills were acquired?	Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes	Testing before and after training, trainer observations, measurement against performance criteria	Confirms that learning objectives have been met; identifies new knowledge and skills gained
3. Behaviour	How was the learning applied on the job?	Changes in on-the-job behaviours	Self-assessments; assessments by co-workers, supervisors, customers; behavioural checklists	Focuses on transfer; demonstrates degree of performance
4. Results (Return on Investment)	What was the impact of learning on the organization?	Time (e.g. increased speed), quality (e.g. reduced errors), costs (e.g. decreased unit cost), output (e.g. increased volume)	Pre-training (baseline) data compared to post-training measures	Demonstrates the value to the business; aligns to business goals

...what gets measured gets valued...

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Resources

The following is a sample of the resources available to assist employers with information, services and programs.

Government of Alberta

Contact Service Alberta for general inquiries on Alberta government programs and services. Visit the Service Alberta website at **www.gov.ab.ca** or call 310-0000 toll-free anywhere in Alberta. Outside of Alberta call long distance at (780) 427-2711. Phone lines are open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday and voicemail is available after hours.

Deaf or hard of hearing callers with TTY equipment call (780) 427-9999 in Edmonton or 1-800-232-7215 toll-free in other Alberta locations.

Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Albertans seeking information on careers and the labour market, Alberta's employment standards or workplace health and safety advice and regulations have several options for obtaining the material from Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

Alberta Career information Hotline

Call for answers to questions about:

- career planning
- occupations
- work search skills
- education and training options
- the workplace.

Phone: 1-800-661-3753 toll-free in Alberta
(780) 422-4266 in Edmonton

Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing call 1-800-232-7215 toll-free for message relay service or (780) 422-5283 for TDD service.

E-mail: hotline@alis.gov.ab.ca

Website: **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/hotline**

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website: www.alis.gov.ab.ca

ALIS is the Internet gateway to career, learning and employment information in Alberta. Includes labour market bulletins and news, provincial growth trends and statistics, and occupational profiles. ALIS will lead you to resources such as:

- **OCCinfo (www.alis.gov.ab.ca/occinfo)**—an on-line database of up-to-date profiles for more than 500 occupations, including information about duties, working conditions, personal characteristics, educational requirements and salary
- **EDinfo (www.alis.gov.ab.ca/edinfo)**—an on-line database of educational and training programs available on site and through distance learning from Alberta-based public and private colleges, universities, university colleges, technical institutes and private vocational schools licensed or registered in Alberta
- **WAGEinfo (www.alis.gov.ab.ca/wageinfo)**—the Alberta Wage and Salary Survey covers over 500 occupations for full-time and part-time employees in Alberta by occupation, geographic location and industry group
- **CERTinfo (www.alis.gov.ab.ca/certinfo)**—this directory provides information about occupations governed by Alberta legislation and regulations. It includes registration or certification requirements to work in specified skilled occupations in Alberta.
- Publications and posters on career, learning and employment topics, including:
  - *Alberta Careers Update.* This book looks at the global and provincial trends affecting Alberta's economy and society. These trends have an impact on occupations in the province and can affect your employee development decisions.
  - *Finders & Keepers: Recruitment and retention strategies.* This publication presents the business case about the cost of employee turnover and information to help employers attract, recruit, select and retain employees.
  - *Better Balance, Better Business: Options for work-life issues.* This book is for employers and managers interested in learning more about how pressures at work and outside the workplace can affect the business and what can be done to improve the situation.

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- *Let's Talk: A guide to resolving workplace conflicts.* Sometimes relationships between people are the source of problems at the worksite. *Let's Talk* offers practical tips for employers and workers and identifies sources for professional help in conflict resolution.

You can order or download an on-line copy of these publications at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop** or call the Alberta Career Information Hotline.

Workplace Health and Safety Contact Centre

Employers and employees will find a wealth of information on workplace health and safety issues in Alberta and resources for safety and wellness training. If you have a question or a concern, contact Workplace Health and Safety at:

Phone: 1-866-415-8690 toll-free in Alberta

E-mail: whs@gov.ab.ca

Website: **www.whs.gov.ab.ca**

Employment Standards

The Employment Standards section of Alberta Human Resources and Employment oversees many of the regulations affecting the workplace relationship between workers and employers. If you have questions about employment standards regulations, you can get information through their toll-free help line or Internet web pages.

Phone: (780) 427-3731 in the Edmonton area or dial 310-0000 and then (780) 427-3731 for callers elsewhere in Alberta.

Website: **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/employmentstandards**

Alberta labour market information

For labour market information at the community or provincial level, visit the website at **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/lmi**.

Alberta Advanced Education

Alberta Advanced Education is responsible for post-secondary education, apprenticeship and industry training and community based adult learning. More details on education and training options in the province can be located through:

Website: **www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca**

Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training

Contact Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training offices to inquire about training in apprenticeship programs, including the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) for youth.

Phone: 310-0000 toll-free, then enter (780) 427-2711 or call the Alberta Career Information Hotline for the office nearest you.

Website: **www.tradesecrets.org**

Community Based Adult Learning

Alberta Advanced Education works with the 83 Community Adult Learning Councils to provide a range of programs across the province. Councils provide non-credit learning opportunities to adults in English as a Second Language, French as a Second Language, literacy and employability enhancement and community issues. Councils respond to their communities' unique learning needs and are a place to find information on local learning opportunities.

Phone: 310-0000 toll-free, then enter (780) 427-7219

Website: **www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/other/**

Learning and development toolkit

Tools to assist you in developing your own learning and development plan. The Personnel Administration Office of the Alberta Government developed this material. The content can be applied to many organizations.

Website: **www.pao.gov.ab.ca/toolkit/**

Government of Canada

Call 1-800-622-6232 (1-800-O-Canada) to be directed to an appropriate Canadian government office. Assistance is available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday to Friday.

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Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

The Department of Human Resources and Skills Development is responsible for providing all Canadians with the tools they need to thrive in their workplace and community. This department supports human capital development, labour market development and is dedicated to establishing a culture of lifelong learning for Canadians.

Website: **www.hrsdc.gc.ca**

Federal services where you live: Alberta, Northwest Territories and Nunavut

Provides information on region-specific services for individuals and organizations. Click on Services Where You Live.

Website: **www.hrsdc.gc.ca**

National Occupation Classification (NOC)

The NOC 2001 website contains the classification structure and descriptions of 520 occupational unit groups and includes over 30,000 occupational titles. It also features an intuitive search engine to help you find the information you need. An on-line training tutorial is available to assist new users and NOC trainers.

Website: **www23.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/2001/e/generic/welcome.shtml**

Build your occupational profile

Build a profile for the occupation of your choice. The report can be customized or tailored to meet your needs.

Website: **www.labourmarketinformation.ca** and click on Build Your Occupational Profile.

Essential skills profiles

Detailed skills profiles for hundreds of occupations, focusing on the essential skills (e.g. reading, writing, oral communication) required for each occupation.

Website: **www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/English/general/default.asp**

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Sector councils

Sector councils bring together business and labour representatives from an industry to analyse human resource issues and identify possible solutions that will enable that sector to become more globally competitive. The Alliance of Sector Councils is a national organization that can provide a helping hand in regional issues relating to human resource development.

Website: **www.councils.org**

Other useful websites

Job Futures is a career planning tool that provides information about 226 occupational groups and describes the work experiences of recent graduates from 155 programs of study.

Website: **www.jobfutures.ca**

The Business Link, with support from the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta, offers a resource library, small business seminars and advice from management consultants. Located in Edmonton but serving the whole province, the organization is linked to a network of regional partners, some of whom can provide video access for presentations.

Phone: 1-800-272-9675 toll-free in Alberta

Website: **www.cbsc.org/alberta**

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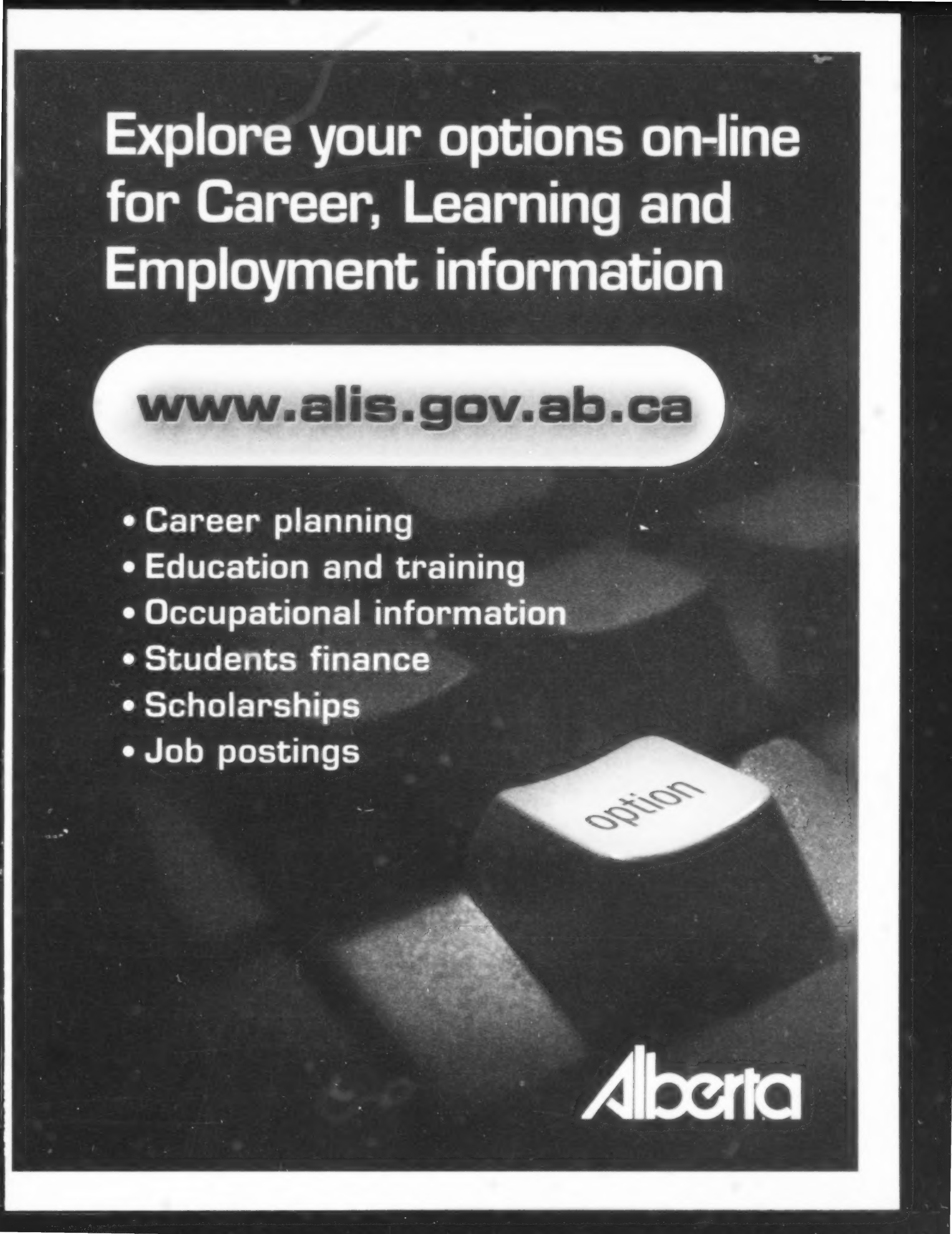
Explore your options on-line for Career, Learning and Employment information

www.alis.gov.ab.ca

- Career planning
- Education and training
- Occupational information
- Students finance
- Scholarships
- Job postings



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